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Greece: When a NATO Anchor Goes Adrift

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With the resignation of President Constantine Karamanlis on March 10, infighting turned to out-fighting in Greece. Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou precipitated the trouble by suddenly withdrawing support for Karamanlis' second five-year term.

Just why Papandreou reversed his stance so abruptly is not yet clear; what is clear is that a showdown struggle for political primacy now is out in the open, and that the outcome will have far-reaching international as well as national repercussions. Greece, situated as it is at the crossroads of Europe, Asia and Africa, constitutes the southern anchor of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Under the Greek constitution, a two-thirds vote of the 300-member Parliament is required to elect a new president. On March 16, Papandreou's nominee, Supreme Court Judge Christos Sartzitakis, received only 178 votes. Parliament was to have voted again this past Saturday and, if necessary, on March 27. On the third try only 180 votes would be required to elect the new president. Sartzitakis is expected to win on the third vote, in which case Papandreou will be the undisputed head of Greece until October, 1985, when his four-year term expires and a new election becomes mandatory. If Sartzitakis fails to win the needed 180 votes, then the acting president must dissolve Parliament and hold elections by May 6.

Whether the next election is in May or October, it will be a no-holds-barred brawl. Papandreou has already called on his followers "to take up battle stations." The chief opposition to Papandreou's Pan-Hellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) is the conservative New Democracy Party headed by Constantine Mitsotakis. But the most powerful opponent Papandreou faces is the 78-year-old Karamanlis, who has served as prime minister and president for a total of 19 years. Greek electoral contests are usually intense and vituperative; the forthcoming campaign will probably be more so.

Both American officialdom and American media have already taken sides. Karamanlis is being touted as a "principled conservative" and Papandreou stigmatized as "slippery," "anti-American" and "demagogic." This appraisal is sim-

plistic and misleading. Consider the 1979 exchange between Papandreou and Karamanlis in the Greek Parliament:

Papandreou, as an opposition deputy, asked whether nuclear weapons were stored at the American bases in Greece. Karamanlis, as prime minister, replied that by treaty provisions, "the facilities do not have nuclear weapons, nor may they be used for war operations without permission of the Greek government." But it was later reported that in a series of secret agreements the Greek government not only had accepted the stationing of nuclear weapons, but had agreed to "exclusive U.S. activity" at the Heraklion base, where "there will be no Greek authority, supervision, or presence. . . ."

This episode not only renders suspect the conventional appraisal of the two Greek leaders, but also suggests an explanation for the widespread anti-American sentiment revealed by polls recently conducted in Greece. Ever since their country became independent in 1830, Greek political leaders have been doing what Karamanlis did in 1979. The reason was plain and naked force.

Sir Edmund Lyons, the British minister to Athens, said in 1841: "A truly independent Greece is an absurdity. Greece can be either English or Russian, and since she must not be Russian, it is necessary that she be English." The British navy dominated the eastern Mediterranean in the 19th Century, so Greece did become "English." The American fleet dominated the area after World War II; Greece became "American."

Greek political leaders accepted the manipulation of their country on the global chessboard. They assumed there was no feasible alternative, so a cozy relationship developed between Greek politicians serving as pawns and the great powers conducting their global strategies.

This comfortable arrangement has been challenged in recent years by Papandreou. He warned that pawns, by definition, are used and then discarded when no longer needed. His argument struck a responsive chord among a people who had suffered so grievously during and since World War II: victims of successive great-power interventions.

What has made Papandreou particularly unsettling is that he was serious about his "Greece first" rhetoric, and that he strove earnestly to implement it when he became prime minister. In doing so he

stepped mostly on American toes, because the United States has been the dominant power. Hence the clashes between Washington and Athens when he advocated Balkanuclearization, cooling the arms race, downgrading both the NATO and Warsaw Pact alliances, the focusing of Greek defenses against the direct Turkish threat in the east rather than against communist states to the north, with which Greece has enjoyed friendly relations.

Because of this foreign policy, Papandreou now is generally described as "anti-American"—a label we affix to one who pursues a "Greece first" policy matching the "America first" policy we assume to be proper for ourselves.

This is not to suggest that Papandreou is blameless for current U.S.-Greece tensions. He was needlessly abrasive when he stated that the Korean Airlines plane shot down by the Soviets was on a CIA spy mission, and then admitted he had no proof. Often, Papandreou appears to be indulging in rhetoric that may be good domestic politics but do not help American relations.

But it would be disingenuous to pretend that the basic issue is mere rhetorical style. More fundamentally, it is the inevitable clash between a great power viewing all regional conflicts in terms of East-West global confrontation, and a resurgent local nationalism in a small power rejecting its traditional role as passive pawn in great-power stratagems.

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